

Just before the war a German named Schaeffer was travelling in Tibet and Sikkim. He obtained specimens of Tahr which were named *schaefferi* by a German zoologist. Owing to the war, the description of this, as a new species (or sub-species?), is not obtainable in this country.

In the Sikkim shooting licence, the Tahr was deliberately omitted from the list of game which might be shot, as it was not intended to allow any to be killed on a normal shooting trip. The licence did not include a complete list of game animals to be found in Sikkim.

HILL HOUSE, NORTHPREPS,
CROMER, NORFOLK, ENGLAND,
November 29, 1943.

F. M. BAILEY,
Lt.-Col.

3.—CANINE TEETH IN CHITAL (*AXIS AXIS*) STAGS.

On page 169 of the Society's *Journal* for December, 1943 (vol. xlv, No. 2), Pocock states that in Axis deer, generally known as the chital in India and as the spotted deer in Ceylon, the upper canine teeth are typically absent—in both sexes.

Pocock quotes Lydekker as saying, on unstated authority, that the canine teeth are generally absent in Axis, a contention which was repeated or copied by Phillips. Pocock found that the canine teeth were 'entirely absent' in all the numerous skulls he examined at the British Museum.

I have not got my reference—nor Game Book with me, but I wonder if your readers who have shot the lovely Axis stag will agree with these rather general statements.

Many times I have been surprised to find that big game hunters had never heard of these well-known teeth in stags, the *haken* as German and Austrian stalkers call them—much prized trophies when mounted acorn-fashion in badges and brooches.

I have pointed out these rudimentary teeth in Axis stags more than once to friends in the field, and somewhere in my collections there must be a few sets but it is not possible to post them to you at the moment.

No doubt these teeth, as found in Axis, can only be called rudimentary, they are not solid and fully developed as in the stags of Europe. As a rule they are just under the skin of the upper gums and have not broken through. In a few cases they are visible as small white spots.

They can be lifted out quite easily and rather resemble the thin broken shell of a tiny egg. It is not surprising that the skulls in the British Museum should not show any of these teeth as they are lost at once when the flesh has rotted or the skull has been boiled and cleaned. There is no socket. The skull of the European stag does not show these teeth, although the animal grows fully developed and solid ones.

Strange to say many trackers—as a rule keen observers—rarely know about this and are interested when shown them.

Is Pocock correct in saying 'absent in *both* sexes'? I have never heard of these 'haken' having been taken from a hind.

Pocock's observations are I think often rather general. It is no criterion (page 173) to think that the Axis skull in the Ceylon deer is noticeably smaller than the skull of the Indian specimens. Pocock had only two ♂ skulls from Ceylon for study, both said to have been collected near Cheddikulam. It would be more correct to get a good series from the south-eastern regions, where the best type of Axis deer is found, and with which the North Ceylon spotted deer—of very poor physique due to feeding, continual harassing and disturbing, poaching, etc.—cannot bear comparison. It is not possible to arrive at any correct data from only two skulls picked up anyhow in the Island.

It is by no means clear why there should be the sub-specific name *ceylonensis*, merely because the Ceylon spotted deer, as a rule, is a poorer beast which grows a poorer head than his Indian brother. The slight differences in colour of coat (for which many reasons could be given), body pattern, etc., are of too small significance to warrant another sub-species being added to the already numerous—and often doubtful so called sub-species which scientists worry about and burden us with.

I agree with Pocock (page 172) where he says that the sub-specific status of *ceylonensis* is hardly permissible.

COLOMBO, CEYLON, A. C. TUTEIN NOLTHENIUS, F.Z.S.
Box 15,
February 4, 1944.

4.—'BURIAL GROUND' OF ELEPHANTS

A legendary belief.

In the *Royal Natural History*, edited by Richard Lydekker, I came across the following passage about the Indian Elephant:

'A curious circumstance in connection with these animals is, that the bones of those which have died a natural death are scarcely ever found in the forests of India, and we believe that the same is true with regard to Africa. It has accordingly been suggested that elephants are in the habit of resorting to particular spots when about to die, as is known to be the case with the guanaco in South America. . . . , but as no such mortuaries have ever been discovered in India, this seems scarcely tenable, and the subject accordingly still remains a complete mystery'.

As the above passage was written as long ago as the year 1894 I think this mystery must have since been solved and I shall be obliged for information on the subject. I have no other book for reference on the subject.

As regards the habit of resorting to dying places I shall be glad to know your opinion on the subject as to the reason of this interesting habit. Guanacos of the Llama family in South America have been known to have their dying places where they go when wounded or when they feel their end near. Referring to these places Darwin, as quoted by the same author, says, 'on the banks of the Santa Cruz . . . always near the river the ground was actually white